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ENGLISH COURSES IN THE SMALL COLLEGE

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No interpretation of the ideal university has a more truly American ring than that expressed in the purpose of Ezra Cornell to found "an institution where any person can find instruction in any subject." But this, it is important to remember, is a definition of a university; and what is worthy ambition in such an institution may, for that very reason, be a dangerous infatuation in a small college. The small college cannot offer "any subject," not only because its financial resources forbid, but because the number of its students does not warrant such a multiplication of classes. Since its need is to be strong within a limited field rather than to expand, its special problems are those of careful selection. And nowhere do these problems need more consideration than in the department of English, for "English" includes both an exceptionally wide range of subjects, any one of which at least a few students may desire instruction in, and a limited number of subjects which should always be open to every student in college.

In the college in which I began to teach, about twenty years ago, less money perhaps was available for instruction than in most colleges, and at the head of the English department was a man who had the most kindly and sincere sympathy for all who worked with him. The subjects that were offered, therefore, were to some little extent determined by what the individual instructors happened to be prepared in and interested to teach. Of late I have had occasion to study the catalogues of a number of small colleges, and it has seemed to me that in many instances exigencies of the staff of instruction still determine the courses offered. I believe, however, that there are definite principles according to which the work of the department ought to be laid out, and that those principles may be so formulated as to apply to colleges varying in character and in size of endowment. A statement of these principles, which I have

had to make for a special occasion, may offer suggestions to some of the readers of the *English Journal*.

It is assumed here that all instruction is given in half-year subjects and that English is required during each half of the freshman year and is open to election during the remaining three years.

During the freshman year the student should be taught, by means of oral and written work, to understand and appreciate his own experience with the added maturity that should distinguish college from secondary schools; he should be trained to express his thoughts effectively; and he should be led, through the discussion of his papers and by varied reading carefully adapted to his own individual needs, to broaden his outlook on life. It has come to be a common practice now to make the composition for the first semester as varied as possible and for the second to specialize mainly on exposition. Exposition is the form for which the largest number will find use, and it serves equally well as foundational training in clear thinking and as preparation for any further instruction in composition. The required work for the year should serve as a general and necessary introduction to all the elective subjects.

"English" is generally considered to include composition, language study, and literature. Literature may be studied historically, that is to say, in its broad relations to life; or it may be studied as a fine art, either as the work of an individual writer or as a particular form, such as the novel or the drama. Subjects of each of these general types should be open for election.

Certain of these subjects would inevitably be offered every year. Those that are introductory should be open for election at any time any student wishes them; and the subjects in composition should also be open every year, not only in order that any student may take what he wishes at the most fitting time in his special course; but also that the work may be made more effective by being taught in small classes. On the other hand, for the student who wishes to continue the study of literature it is not so important that he be able to get a particular subject in a given year, and it is not so important that the classes be small. It is common practice to give such subjects in alternate years, but it is more economical to give them in three-year cycles. The important thing

is to make it possible for the student to study something in the way of period, writer, or form, whichever he may wish, each term, and if every subject is given once in three years he is sure of one chance to take any particular subject he may wish during the years when he may elect.

When exposition is studied during the freshman year two elective subjects in composition almost inevitably follow: argument and narration-description. Those who care to continue their instruction still further are usually of two sorts: those who intend to teach English and those who have real ambition to write. For the first class, a subject in advanced rhetoric (for teachers) might well be offered. For the second class, training in composition is best given in connection with the study of special literary forms to be mentioned later.

Language study in college is generally of two sorts: historical and pedagogical. The introductory subject in Shakspeare (to be noted later) will serve as an excellent general introduction to all language study. This might be followed by Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, and Chaucer, each given as first- and second-semester subjects in a three-year cycle. For pedagogical purposes, a subject in grammar (for teachers primarily) might be given in the semester in which the advanced rhetoric is not given.

For the historical study of literature there should be a general introductory course extending through a year: the first half dealing with origins mainly and covering from the beginning to the middle of the eighteenth century; the second half dealing mainly with our own times, from the point at which the first semester subject ends. If the number of hours that can be given to this sort of work is strictly limited, the time following the Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, and Chaucer (previously mentioned) might be divided into the following six periods: Elizabethan, Puritan, Restoration-Classic, Romantic, Victorian, and Recent. These would fill up just one three-year cycle for each semester. If resources permit, this work could easily be made more complete and thorough by dividing these periods and particularly by including American with English literature. In this way two subjects of this type might be offered each semester.

For the study of literature as a fine art, a subject in Shakspeare, consisting of a minute study of a single play, or at most two, serves as an excellent introduction. In it students may be given not only a sound foundation for language study, but also an equally valuable training in the study of a writer and of a form of literature. For further study of writers the following might be selected as forming one three-year cycle: Shakspeare (a literary study of all his plays), Tennyson, Browning; Milton, Carlyle, and Ruskin might form another cycle; and so on. For the study of literary forms the following would make an acceptable three-year cycle for the two terms: the novel, the essay, the short story; criticism, drama, and poetry.

This system of arrangement would seem to have the following advantages: (1) it makes it possible to insert or remove subjects to answer special needs without destroying the general systematic character of the work of the department; (2) it opens every year

TABLE I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO ALL COURSES: Freshman English (1) (2, Including Exposition)

ELECTIVES	COMPOSITION	LANGUAGE STUDY	LITERATURE		
			Literature and Life	Literature as Fine Art	
				General Introduction: (Shakspeare 1)	
				Writer	Form
	Argument Narration-Description Advanced Rhetoric <i>See also:</i> Novel, Essay, Short Story, Criticism, Drama, Poetry	General Introduction: [<i>See</i> Shakspeare (1)] Anglo-Saxon (1), (2) Middle English (1), (2) Chaucer (1), (2) Grammar	General Introduction: Origins, to 1750; Our Own Times Elizabethan Period Puritan Period Restoration-Classic Period Romantic Period Victorian Period Recent Period <i>See also:</i> Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, Chaucer	Shakspeare (2) Tennyson Browning <i>See also:</i> Anglo-Saxon (2) Chaucer (2)	Novel Essay Short Story Criticism Drama Poetry

TABLE II

	First Semester	Second Semester
First Year	<i>Freshman English (1)*</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Grammar</i> <i>Shakspeare (1)</i> <i>History of Literature to 1750</i> Anglo-Saxon (1) Elizabethan Period The Novel	<i>Freshman English (2)</i> <i>Narration-Description</i> <i>Rhetoric</i> Shakspeare (2) <i>History of Literature from 1750</i> Anglo-Saxon (2) Puritan Period Criticism
Second Year	<i>Freshman English (1)</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Grammar</i> <i>Shakspeare (1)</i> <i>History of Literature to 1750</i> Middle English (1) Restoration-Classic Period The Essay	<i>Freshman English (2)</i> <i>Narration-Description</i> <i>Rhetoric</i> Tennyson <i>History of Literature from 1750</i> Middle English (2) Romantic Period The Drama
Third Year	<i>Freshman English (1)</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Grammar</i> <i>Shakspeare (1)</i> <i>History of Literature to 1750</i> Chaucer (1) Victorian Period The Short Story	<i>Freshman English (2)</i> <i>Narration-Description</i> <i>Rhetoric</i> Browning <i>History of Literature from 1750</i> Chaucer (2) Recent Period Poetry

* Italics indicate that the subject is given every year.

those courses that the largest number of students should take; (3) it offers the largest possible range of opportunities with the smallest number of classes; and (4) it makes it easy for any student to plan his whole course so that he may get all the English subjects he wishes.

The accompanying tables suggest a grouping of subjects and an order of presenting them for each term for a cycle of three years.